

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OMB-01 NEAE-00 TRSE-00 PM-04  
NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00  
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /065 W  
-----111257Z 007291 /42

P R 111144Z FEB 77  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6706  
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
CINCPAC

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E.O. 11652:N/A  
TAGS: PINT, CE, EFIN  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA ASSEMBLY PROROGUED

REF: 76 COLOMBO 4084

1. SUMMARY. BY HER ACTION IN RECESSING THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY UNTIL MAY 19, PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE HAS PREVENTED THE SCHEDULED NO-CONFIDENCE DEBATE SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 17, AT WHICH SOME MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT GROUP WERE EXPECTED TO CROSS TO THE OPPOSITION. HER ACTION IS NOT NECESSARILY ANY INDICATION OF EARLY ELECTIONS, WHICH STILL AWAIT FORMAL DISSOLUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY, BUT TIMING MAY BE DISCUSSED AT THE SPECIAL GOVERNMENT PARLIAMENTARY GROUP MEETING FEBRUARY 11. OPPOSITION IS DISGRUNTLED AT LOSING ITS BEST PUBLIC PLATFORM FOR PRE-ELECTION PUBLICITY. RECESS WILL RAISE LEGAL QUESTIONS FOR CONTINUANCE OF STATE OF EMERGENCY WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO BE RE-PROCLAIMED MONTHLY IN ASSEMBLY. END SUMMARY.

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2. ON PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE'S ADVICE, THE PRESIDENT PROROGUED THE SRI LANKA NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY AND AT THE SAME TIME SET ITS NEXT SESSION FOR MAY 19. AS DISTINCT FROM DISSOLUTION, PROROGATION IN THIS CASE IS BASICALLY A RECESS, AS WAS USUAL ANNUALLY IN THE PARLIAMENT OF CEYLON BEFORE 1972 AT THE END OF EACH SESSION. THERE IS PROVISION IN THE 1972 REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION

FOR PROROGATION BUT IT HAS NOT PREVIOUSLY BEEN USED.

3. THE PM'S DECISION TO PROROGUE WAS TAKEN IN ANTICIPATION OF POLITICAL FIREWORKS AT THE FEBRUARY 18 SESSION OF THE NSA WHEN AN OPPOSITION MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT WAS TO BE DEBATED. DURING THE DEBATE, WHICH WAS TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT ACTIONS IN SUPPRESSING THE DECEMBER/JANUARY STRIKES, IT WAS WEDELY ANTICIPATED THAT A MINIMUM OF FOUR GOVERNMENT M.P.'S WOULD CROSS OVER TO THE OPPOSITION. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN SPECULATION THAT THE PM'S COALITION PARTNER, THE COMMUNIST PARTY/ MOSCOW WING (CP), MIGHT ABSTA8N ON THE MOTION, A SLAP AT THE PM AND PROBABLY THE END OF THE COALITION. EVEN A FEW CABINET MEMBERS HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS WAVERING. OPPOSITION TROTSKYITE LEADER N.M. PERERA HAS CONFIDENTLY PREDICTED IN A SPEECH TWO DAYS AGO THAT INDUSTRIES MINISTER T.B. SUBASINGHE WOULD JOIN HIS NEW SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT NEITHER THE COMMUNIST REPRESENTATIVE IN THE CABINET, PIETER KEUNEMAN,NOR SUBASINGHE ATTENDED YESTERDAY'S CABINET MEETING AT WHICH THE PM REPORTED HER DECISION TO PROROGUE THE ASSEMBLY.

4. UNDER THE SRI LANKAN CONSTITUTION, THE NSA MAY BE DISSOLVED AT ANY TIME DURING THE PERIOD OF PROROGATION BY A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION WHICH WOULD SET THE DATE FOR ELECTIONS. OR THE PROROGATION COULD BE LIFTED AND THE NSA RECALLED PRIOR TO MAY 19. THE CONSTITUTIONAL TERM OF THE GOVERNMENT ENDS THREE DAYS LATER  
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ON MAY 22, AND THE NEXT NEWLY ELECTED NSA MUST BE CONVENED NOT LATER THAN FOUR MONTHS FROM THAT DATE (OR THE DATE OF DISSOLUTION, IF THIS IS EARLIER). THE PM THEREFORE RETAINS THE POWER TO SCHEDULE ELECTIONS AT ANY TIME BETWEEN NOW AND SEPTEMBER.

5. REACTION FROM THE OPPOSITION WAS PREDICTABLE. THE TROTSKYITE SINHALA-LANGUAGE DAILY WAS TYPICAL IN ITS HEADLINE ACCUSING THE PM OF ACTING OUT OF FEAR. IT WENT ON TO CLAIM THAT THE DATE FOR PROROGATION WAS DETERMINED BY THE PM'S ASTROLOGERS.THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY HAS CONDEMNED THE ACTION AS WELL. EVEN THE CP DAILY HAS EXPRESSED DISPLEASURE AT THE PM'S MOVE, WHICH SHUT THE MOUTHS OF THEM.P.'S" THE PM HAS CONVENED AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF HER SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR FEBRUARY 11 TO EXPLAIN HEER DECISION, PLAN STRATEGY AND POSSIBLY TO FINALIZE CANDIDATE LISTS FOR THE ELECTION. SHE SHOULD FACE NO OPPOSITION FROM HER LOYAL PARTY MEMBERS WHO HAVE NO MORE TASTE THAN SHE FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM

IN THE ASSEMBLY. IN ADDITION, OPPOSITION SPEECHES  
HAVE GENERALLY BEEN FULLY REPORTED IN THE PRESS WHEN  
MADE IN THE ASSEMBLY BUT OFTEN IGNORED WHEN DELIVERED  
ON THE STUMP. WE MAY SEE LESS REPORTAGE OF  
OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES NOW.

6. ON SIDE-EFFECT OF THIS PROROGATION IS MORE DEBATE  
OVER THE LEGALITY OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY. THE  
EMERGENCY HAS BEEN REDECLARED MONTHLY SINCE MARCH 1971  
BY PUBLICATION IN THE GOVERNMENT GAZETTE AND BY PROCLAMATION  
READ IN THE NSA, ACCORDING TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
THE PUBLIC SECURITY ORDINANCE. UNLESS THE PM INTENDS  
TO LET THE EMERGENCY SAPSE, SHE IS TAKING A CALCULATED  
RISK THAT THE COURTS MIGHT RULE IT INVALID IN ANY FUTURE  
LEGAL CHALLENGE.

7. UNLESS THE NSA IS CALLED BACK SOONER THAN MAY 19,  
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IT APPEARS THAT THERE WILL BE NEW LEGISLATION PASSED  
BY THIS GOVERNMENT. THIS PLACES IN QUESTION THE FINANCE  
MINISTER'S PLANS TO NATIONALIZE FOREIGN BANKS, AN ACTION  
WHICH HE HAD PLANNED TO TAKE BY INTRODUCING LEGISLATION,  
EVEN THOUGH HE COULD PROBABLY DO IT BY RECOURSE TO THE  
EMERGENCY REGULATIONS.

8. THE ACTIVE LOCAL RUMOR MILL VARIES IN  
ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF DISSIDENT SLFP MEMBERS WHO  
HAD PLANNED THE DRAMATIC ACT OF CROSSING OVER DURING  
THE PLANNED FEB. 17 NO CONFIDENCE DEBATE. FURTHERMORE,  
THE NUMBER OF THOSE PLANNING TO DO SO ON WHAT  
MIGHT BE CALLED IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS MAY BE AUGMENTED  
BY THOSE WHO KNEW THEY WERE TO BE DROPPED FROM THE PARTY  
LISTS FOR THE COMING ELECTION. IT IS GENERALLY  
ACCEPTED THAT THE PROROGATION RESULTS FROM THE PM'S  
UNWILLINGNESS TO FACE EITHER THE DEBATE OR THE PUBLIC  
DEFLECTIONS, AND TO THIS EXTENT HER ACTION MAY BE TAKEN  
AS A CONFESSION OF WEAKNESS. CERTAINLY THIS WILL BE THE  
OPPOSITION CRY. YET IT IS ALSO AN INDICATION SHE IS  
DETERMINED TO CONTINUE TO DOMINATE EVENTS RATHER THAN  
BE DOMINATED BY THEM. BY CATCHING HER OPPOSITION OFF  
GUARD, SHE HAS ONCE AGAIN PROVED HER POLITICAL ACUMEN  
AND HER UNPREDICTABILITY. DISSOLUTION, WHEN IT COMES,  
IS LIKELY TO BE AS CLOSELY-HELD A DECISION AS THIS  
ONE. IT IS STILL SHE WHO HAS THE OPTION OF TIMING.  
REED

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## Message Attributes

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**Type:** TE  
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